

BRIEFING DETAILS

BRIEFING DATE / TIME	Thursday, 3 June 2021, 12:15- 12:45pm (on site) and 2pm – 2:30pm (Council offices) Site inspection undertaken before briefing
LOCATION	On site, and at Dubbo Regional Council chambers

BRIEFING MATTER(S)

PPSWES-71 – Dubbo Regional Council– DA21-141 – 19L Sheraton Road Dubbo– Electricity generating works (solar farm)

PANEL MEMBERS

IN ATTENDANCE	Garry Fielding (Chair), Graham Brown, Sandra Hutton, Lindsay Mathieson, Josie Howard
APOLOGIES	None
DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	None

OTHER ATTENDEES

COUNCIL ASSESSMENT STAFF	Josh Smith, Shaun Reynolds (Team Leader), Tracie Smart, Cathy Ching
OTHER	Jane Gibbs, Kim Holt (DPIE)

The Panel notes that only desktop investigations were undertaken in preparing the environmental assessment, no site investigations were undertaken. Given the past agricultural uses of the site, this is likely to be acceptable for most issues, noting that Council has already issued some requests for further information.

Key discussion points:

1. Biodiversity assessment

The assessment officer noted that he is still seeking clarification from the applicant about whether a Biodiversity Development Assessment Report (BDAR) is required. A Request for Further Information (RFI) was issued on 3 May 2021.

2. Aboriginal Cultural Heritage assessment

The Panel noted that the applicant is yet to provide an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage assessment report to support their application, and that council has requested this. The Request for Further Information (RFI) was issued on 3 May 2021.

3. Landscaping Plan

The Panel requested that a Landscaping Plan be provided as part of the environmental assessment. The Wellington Road Solar Farm landscaping plan could be used as a model for this purpose.

The Panel noted that it is preferably that landscaping is located on the outside of security fences, and this is the case at this development.

4. Traffic impacts

The Panel questioned whether there has been any consultation with the schools in the vicinity given that there will be large trucks using local roads during the construction period. The Panel considers that the applicant should consult with the local schools and establish a communication protocol with the school communities.

It was noted that the nearby quarry was required to produce a traffic safety plan to exclude any vehicle movements between peak school periods – eg from 8:30 – 9am and 3 - 3:30pm. This project may need to include such provisions in a driver code of conduct and manage any potential impacts through a traffic management plan. The assessment officer will consider this issue in his assessment report.

5. Fencing

The Panel noted that the fence for this site is proposed to be 2.3m high. It is not clear what the rationale for a fence of this height is and the Panel chair requested the assessment officer check the regulatory requirement for fencing of solar farms. The fence should be located on the inside of any landscaping.

6. Fire and emergency management

The Panel noted that if a solar panel catches fire it will create nano particles. This application does not appear to have dealt with this issue. The Panel requests further information on how the battery storage area would be managed if there was a fire or emergency.

7. End of life management of solar panels

The Panel noted a statement in the environmental assessment regarding the project producing ‘affordable local clean power without the government subsidies’. It is unclear what this statement means. The application does not contain any information on how disposal of solar panels at the end of their life will be managed. The Panel understands there is only one company in Adelaide that currently recycles panels, and that solar panels cannot be placed into landfill. Some councils charge a levy for disposal of disused rooftop solar panels. The Panel suggested a condition may be required to manage this issue.

8. Consent runs with the land

The Panel notes that for DA consents, all parties should be aware that the consent runs with the land – so if the operator leaves it remains the responsibility of the owner of the land to manage the impacts.

9. Cumulative impacts and land use conflict

The Panel noted that within the Central West-Orana Renewable Energy Zone, it has started to see an increased number of applications for solar farms.

Given that the area around Dubbo consists of prime agricultural land, there is ongoing potential for land use conflicts and could result in impacts on liveability through changing the character of the area.

TENTATIVE PANEL MEETING DATE: August 2021